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ABSTRACT

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Teaching Reading in the Upper Primary School: A comparison of two teachers' approaches

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T. Woolacott

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Paper presented at the annual conference of the

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Abstract:

A variety of approaches to the teaching of reading has been applied in primary classrooms. While much information is available on the teaching of reading in the early years, little is forthcoming to guide teachers of older students. This qualitative research served to identify the beliefs and pedagogies of two experienced year seven teachers in regard to the teaching of reading. A series of interviews with each of these teachers was designed to elicit information on how each teacher approached the teaching of reading, and to trace possible influences on pedagogical decisions made. The study revealed the importance of personal beliefs on shaping reading instruction, providing for rather different approaches even though perceived aims were similar. The findings of this research have application to classroom practice and to understanding teacher decision making.

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Background and Introduction:

Purpose of Study:

This study was initiated with the intention of uncovering the practices involved in teaching reading in the upper primary school. A plethora of materials, assistance and research exists for those teaching beginning readers, but little is offered in the way of implementing reading instruction with older children. As a primary school teacher, a university educator of preservice teachers, and as a researcher I aimed to discover what teachers actually do in reading instruction in the upper primary school. As such, there were two aims identified for this research:

- To outline the beliefs, methods and materials used by upper-primary school teachers to teach reading;
- To trace some of the influences impacting on the development of upper-primary school teachers' knowledge and philosophy of the teaching of reading.

Significance of Study:

While the perennial call for 'back to basics' and its emphasis on the 'three R's' remains unaltered, what constitutes elements of the 'basics' has certainly evolved. Advances in technology and the movement towards multi-cultural societies have broadened the definitions of 'literacy' and the 'literate individual'. Indeed, students are now expected to be capable and critical users of a variety of literacies within the social and economic environments they encounter. Teachers must therefore address the needs of students to be effective literacy consumers and operators in a rapidly changing world. By definition, the ability to read is a key aspect of literacy. Traditionally, intensive programmes in reading have been present in the lower primary grades where a multitude of decoding skills and experiences of texts are addressed. To this end, a plethora of locally produced and professionally manufactured reading materials and skills-based programmes are available. Recently, Education Queensland initiatives including the Year 2 Net and Reading Recovery programmes have also been aimed at reading in the lower primary setting. Instruction in middle primary classes are seen as extensions of the reading programmes in the lower school, continuing skill development while moving to using reading as an avenue for learning. (i.e. moving from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'). (Indrisano & Chall 1995) However, little assistance seems available for teachers of reading in the upper primary school. The present guidelines for the teaching of English provided by Education Queensland offer very little, if any, guidance for the teaching of reading as a separate entity within a language programme. Reading and writing are understandably interconnected aspects of literacy, but there are areas where explicit instruction in either reading or writing is required.

A significant finding of the National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS) in 1997 was that 'there was virtually no growth during the middle years in reading, writing, speaking and listening.' (N.B. 'Middle years' as it is referred to here relates to the upper primary year levels and the lower grades in secondary school; while 'middle primary' refers to grades three, four and five in the primary school.) For many students then, literacy proficiency stagnates after the early years of schooling. Given the shift in emphasis from learning to read in the lower primary school, to reading to learn in the upper primary years, coupled with the need for an increased reading load across content areas in secondary school, this lack of development in the middle school is of concern.

In a report compiled by Allan Luke and Peter Freebody for the Queensland Government on literacy instruction in Queensland State Schools, the teaching of reading was highlighted as a priority area of focus. (Education Queensland 2000) In relation to reading Luke and Freebody found 'a general loss of focus on in-service work and further professional upgrading in the teaching of reading'; 'a marked lack of expertise in and focus on the teaching of reading in the middle years and virtually no evidence of such expertise and focus in the secondary years'; and ' an overall lack of systemic direction and guidance from Education Queensland and universities and professional organisations on the teaching of reading.' They also point to pre-service training in reading as 'highly variable' resulting in a multiplicity of practices, approaches and metalanguages. (Education Queensland 2000, p.75)

In acknowledging these findings one is led to wonder upon what does happen in reading classrooms, especially those of the middle school, and from where or what teachers draw in deciding how to teach reading. Knowledge of practices and influences on reading instruction would allow for critical reflection on practice and philosophy, a necessary aspect of any professional activity. It is of timely importance as Queensland schools prepare for the implementation of Whole School Literacy Plans which incorporate the adoption of the 'Four Resources Model' proposed by Luke and Freebody (1999). Identification of teaching practices and where they stand in comparison to this model should suggest the ease or difficulties associated with teachers adopting the four resources approach in their classrooms. Knowledge of actual classroom pedagogy is also useful in preparing undergraduate teachers for their transition into the teaching profession. Course content that acknowledges current pedagogical practice along with suggested future practices and considerations, provides for an ease of transition for student teachers from the often highly theoretical preparation programmes of universities, to the practicalities of the classroom.

A qualitative study of one teacher's practice serves to provide themes and issues relevant to the research topic. A second study can provide similar information; but a comparison of these studies allows for greater understanding of themes and issues that are common and/or different in both teachers' practices. Research such as this study, repeated in the same school context permits ease of comparison and contrast of teacher's decision making processes.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Practices:

The interplay of a teacher's professional, practical and personal knowledge impacts on a teacher's knowledge base and belief system. Professional knowledge relates to knowledge developed within academic programmes such as teacher education programmes or professional development seminars. Practical knowledge refers to knowledge which arises from practice in the field and critical evaluation of such. Personal knowledge occurs as a result of an individual's life experiences within a particular social and cultural context. (Grisham 2000) Of these areas of knowledge, research has shown that professional knowledge gains least acknowledgement as impacting on teacher practice. This may result from a perceived lack of explicit relationship between professional knowledge and that of practical knowledge. Research cited by Archer (2000) shows that emphasis on theoretical frameworks that is characteristic of teacher preparation courses exerts little influence on teacher practice.

Marland (1996) sees practical knowledge resulting from an innate human tendency to theorise from puzzling experiences. The difficulties in tracing teachers' practical knowledge arise from the facts that it is usually implicit knowledge that is not recorded, and it is context specific and individualised. Individual teachers' practical knowledge springs from their individual experiences within individual classrooms, and may change from one classroom to the next. So, while teachers' professional knowledge may be generalised, teachers' practical knowledge cannot. Marland suggests that a teacher's practical knowledge may be represented via metaphors teachers use to describe their roles, their values and beliefs, images of their classrooms, tactics and principles adopted and their pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge is described by Quinn (1994) as a type of content knowledge particular to teaching. It is different to subject matter knowledge held by discipline experts in that this knowledge assumed an aspect of how a teacher makes concepts explicit to students.

Personal knowledge as defined by Grisham (2000, p.147) 'is the sum of beliefs developed in the individual over the course of his or her lifetime based upon acculturation and socialisation in a given society.' However, knowledge is seen as separate from beliefs. Beliefs can be seen to relate to a person's values, attitudes and ideologies while knowledge refers to statements of fact. (Meijer 2001) Personal knowledge and beliefs are powerful determinants of teacher practice. Archer (2000) suggests that beliefs about teaching formed when teachers were themselves students, or as beginning teachers learning from colleagues, have a greater impact on teacher practice than professional knowledge. Beliefs in fact act as filters through which experiences are sifted and evidence to further confirm beliefs is collected. It is therefore imperative that personal beliefs are identified and acknowledged for effective critical reflection to occur. Critical reflection is a necessary prerequisite for change. Research has shown that teachers' reading instructional practices are directly related to their underlying beliefs about reading. It is appropriate that critical reflection on practices and the beliefs they are built on is undertaken as a way of validating present practice and/or as a necessary prerequisite for change.

Reading Theory:

In recent years much has been written about the so called 'reading wars', of whole language versus phonics, explicit versus implicit teaching, on how children learn to read. Often these discussions have focussed on the beginning reader. Research involving readers in the later years of primary school have tended to spotlight problems that specific readers may be experiencing. That is to say, much research in this area addresses the teaching from a deficit perspective, or it may focus on the development of a particular area or skill of reading such as comprehension (Katims & Harris 1997) or vocabulary (Harmon 1998). Very little exists to suggest how a teacher approaches teaching reading in the general context of an upper primary classroom. It is not surprising that the National Schools English Literacy Survey of 1996 found little progress in reading development in the middle years. While it is very important to address reading problems that are present in this part of the school, it is just as important to formulate a plan for the continued development of the majority of class members who do cope with reading. Identification of what actually is occurring in upper primary classrooms, drawing on experienced teachers' knowledge, would be useful in determining a framework of emphases and pedagogies relevant to this context. One way of tracking the effects on a teacher's approach to the teaching of reading is to identify underlying beliefs and theories.

The teaching of reading has been characterised over the last few decades by changes in theory involving views on the reading process, the learner and cognition, and reading as social practice. As these theories have evolved and been disseminated, they have been translated into a variety of pedagogical practices and accompanying materials. Commitment to a particular theory (e.g. Whole Language or Phonics) has in the past led to polarisation in practices and theorists vehemently defending their stances. (Chall 1992, Emmitt 1998, Luke & Freebody 1999) However, for the most part I would argue that teachers are generally eclectic in nature when it comes to theoretical and pedagogical application. They listen to, read and view new thought, adopting and adapting practices and theories depending on their own philosophies, experiences, contexts, and needs. As such, a teacher's approach to reading may include elements of a variety of theoretical views. Historically, views on reading may be classified into three broad categories: 'reading as a hierarchy of skills, reading as a psycholinguistic process, reading as social practice'. (Emmitt 1998, p.2) In considering reading as skills, one focuses on the physical reading process while adopting the psycholinguistic stance entails a focus on the learner and cognition. Drawing attention to the social and cultural context of readers and text characterises reading as a social practice. Identified as such, an eclectic view would appear justified. Instruction that includes consideration of the individual, the act and the social dimensions of reading would work towards a balanced program. Indeed, Judith Rivalland encourages an eclectic approach as it is unlikely that one 'right methodology' will emerge.

> *[I]t appears that teaching literacy requires highly skilled teachers who have the knowledge, sensitivity and capacity to adapt their teaching methodologies to the differing contexts and conditions in which children grow up.*

(Rivalland 2000)

While a mixture of methodologies may be adopted, skill and acuity is required in ensuring those applied are complementary. Besides matching methodologies with the needs, abilities and characteristics of specific groups of students; teachers must be aware of which methodologies may and may not work together to provide effective pedagogy.

It must be noted that classifying reading theories, models and pedagogies can and is done in a variety of ways encompassing and foregrounding differing perspectives. For instance, Ruddell, Ruddell and Singer (eds 1994) and Harris et al (2001) list transactional reading theory as a separate entity. However, it has been included under a social view in this paper due to its emphasis on the effects of social and cultural experiences on an individual's prior knowledge, and therefore their interaction with text. The three views used to analyse teacher practices in this research (i.e. skills, psycholinguistic and social) were chosen for their perceived impact on classroom pedagogy in Australia over the past few decades; and because focussing on a small number of perspectives allows for a manageable analysis.

Methodology:

This study is in fact a comparison of two separate studies undertaken in the past twelve months. The first study was in the form of a pilot study utilising an interview format as this was considered an appropriate instrument for an initial foray into identifying teacher practices and beliefs. At the conclusion of the pilot study, I evaluated the methodology as successful in meeting its aim, and a repeat of the study was recommended. The second study was then completed, using the same methodology with another teacher within the same school context. This paper then outlines a comparison and contrast of data collected from the previous two studies.

These studies involved a series of three audiotaped semi-structured interviews based on a model suggested by Seidman (1991). Seidman proposed an interview model in which the first interview served to establish a rapport between interviewer and interviewee by focussing on obtaining a professional history of the participant. The second interview would then concentrate on personal experiences of the topic by the participant, while the third interview was set aside for making sense of how personal experiences and history impact on present situations. However, in this study the third interview was used by the interviewer to summarise the information gained from the first two interviews. This allowed the participant to acknowledge the accuracy or otherwise of the researcher's interpretations, while allowing opportunity for further comment by the participant. Questions relating to clarification of issues from the first two interviews were also incorporated.

The interviews took the guise of semi-structured 'elite' interviews. That is to say, the interviewer used a variety of open and closed questions (i.e. semi-structured interview) to explore the topic with an individual considered to speak with authority on the topic (in this case, two experienced middle school teachers presently teaching year seven). (Gillham 2001, pp.63-64) While Gillham suggests that elite interviews are usually unstructured given the authority with which the interviewee speaks, in this case the researcher had some experience with the primary school context and with the theoretical aspects of the topic and so was able to inject more structure than would normally occur. This meant that the interviewer and interviewee relationship was more of a collegial nature than a subject/researcher relationship. A journal of the process was also kept, including observations of the classroom context and of reactions during and after each interview.

Participants in this study were two experienced teachers presently teaching year seven classes in the same school. The first teacher to be interviewed was a female of some sixteen years teachingexperience, who is identified by the letter 'Q' in transcripts and analyses. Most of this experience was accumulated in small schools where Q taught across the year levels. The second teacher was a male having at least twenty years experience teaching in primary schools. This participant is identified by the letter 'R'. R's classroom experiences incorporate teaching children from year three to year seven.

The interviews were completed in the teachers' classrooms. This venue allowed access to programmes and materials should the teacher require them. It was also considered beneficial for the teachers to be in a space in which they felt comfortable and in control. A situation such as this permits easier adoption of the role of interviewer as information seeker, and that of participant as expert. Ulichny and Schoener (1996) suggest that by positioning the teacher as 'primary knower', they are more likely to feel comfortable relating their practices and experiences.

Tapes of these interviews were transcribed. I personally completed transcriptions, and whenever possible, transcribed each interview before the next was undertaken. This process, while time consuming on my part, enabled an accurate transcription aided by recent recollection of the actual interview; and promoted clarity of perception of themes and issues.

Data Analysis:

At the completion of the series of interviews, a content analysis of transcriptions was undertaken to identify beliefs and practices as stated by each teacher. These practices and beliefs were then located within a framework devised by the researcher to identify elements of theoretical reading approaches. For example, 'R's practice of using ability grouping was related to the belief that students of similar ability *interact at a reasonable rate*.(Interview 2.62) This relationship was reiterated (and thus supported) in the third interview. (3.99) These practices and beliefs were then further classified to identify elements of skills, psychosocial or social orientations to reading pedagogy.

Limitations:

An interesting consideration about the methodology adopted in this study was highlighted in the second interview by R. He was concerned about his ability to answer the questions posed in sufficient depth and clarity. While the content of each interview was outlined before the interviews began, and at the start of each interview, (e.g. the first interview was about professional history, the second about how reading is taught, and the third as a summary and chance for clarification) specific questions were not provided by the researcher for R's consideration before each interview. This prompted R to say:

> *The ideas would be a little more forthcoming.. more coherent if I had a chance to.. preview the questions.* (2.30)

The decision not to provide specified questions before each interview occurred for two reasons. Firstly, it was considered that unprepared answers to questions may provide for a more honest reaction to inquiries, and give a clearer indication of the issues foremost in the teacher's consciousness than if time had been given for prior consideration of points. Secondly, freedom to probe areas that were not listed for enquiry but that may have been suggested by R as worthy of investigation, was considered necessary. The structure of the interview series, allowing for summary and clarification in the third interview, and the siting of the interviews in the participant's classroom where materials and programmes are within easy reach, were considered to overcome shortfalls of not providing specific questions in advance.

Another limitation relates to the ability of the interviewer to build rapport between themselves and the participant, and to be an active listener. Taking into consideration pointers on the establishment of rapport by Ulichney and Schoener (1996) relating to issues of trust, benefits to the practitioner, and the power and knowledge differential assisted in maintaining a good rapport between researcher and teachers. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a short list of questions to be addressed, but the success or otherwise of the resulting discourse is also reliant on the interviewer's skill of knowing how and when to probe. The fact that I shared professional knowledge of the area under study may have led to a failure to adequately explore and clarify individual definitions of particular terms and practices.

Findings:

Definitions of 'Literacy' and 'Reading':

As a way of focussing participants onto the topic of reading instruction, and as a means of providing a framework for their philosophical orientations to reading, each teacher was asked to define the terms 'literacy' and 'reading'. Both teachers saw literacy as a way of participating in society or the world. R defined literacy as *a tool for survival in the wider society,* whereas Q saw literacy as *a springboard for interaction with the world.* Within R's explanations, the term 'functional' held precedence. Q acknowledged the functional requirement of literacy, but also the importance of an ability to have fun with language.

> Q: *(I)f you're really literate you need a broad general knowledge, you need a very good vocab, you need to be able to play around with language and have fun with it... You need to enjoy language and use it a lot... I guess you just need to have a love of learning to be literate.*

At the outset then, the views of these two teachers can be seen to have similarities, but different emphases. R works from a functional standpoint where ability in a variety of everyday activities is highlighted, whereas Q adds an element of appreciation and enjoyment in applying skills in interacting with the world.

These attitudes to literacy were extended to individual views of reading. Both teachers saw the act of reading as making meaning. R used an analogy of creating a videotape.

> R: *(S)eeing the printed word and to build up a videotape in their head of what's going on on the page... We can all read a book but we interpret it in different ways based on our experiences because that's what colours the pictures that are up here (in the head).*

While Q did not specifically define the act of reading as R did, she referred to reading's place in literacy as relating what is read to personal experiences, and then to add knowledge gained from reading to increasing understanding of how that relates to the reader and their world.

Reading in the Primary School:

Robb (2002) points out that for years, primary school teachers have worked to a maxim that early years instruction focusses on 'learning to read' and an emphasis on decoding and sight words; and that from year four this changes to 'reading to learn' and an emphasis on applying the ability to decode to learn content-area information. Elements of this point of view are apparent in both Q's and R's discourse.

While R refused comment on reading instruction in the early grades, citing his lack of experience in teaching children below year three, he did identify a difference in instruction on the meaning making process between year four and year seven.

> R: *In year four... there was a lot more teacher-child interaction, a lot more grouping type stuff, a lot more trying to build up that making meaning of the text, and through integrating with other activities like their art, so they start to build the pictures in their head... But up here (in year seven) we assume...that those skills of meaning making are already there when they read the printed word... I think in year seven it's more introspective.. they do it up here (in the head).*

Therefore R concentrates less on the meaning making process and more on having year seven students apply their meaning making skills to a wide variety of everyday texts. The focus thus may be seen in the movement from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'.

On the other hand, Q has taught in all areas of the primary school, but her understanding of reading instruction across the primary school is similar. While Q stresses the enjoyment of reading throughout the primary school curriculum, she sees the early grades as concentrating more on functional aspects of reading, and the higher levels as application of what they read to their knowledge of the world, and of critical analysis of texts.

> Q: *There's lots of that sort of love of reading and immersion. You still want kids to do that right from the beginning... but what you're actually teaching is all that functional stuff; but within the whole overall context... I guess if you're looking at lower, middle and upper school... it's functional. In the middle grades it's still functional, but you're teaching them not just the decoding skills but the whole way language works in paragraphs and the way that authors express ideas and stuff like that. (In the upper school) you want to move on and broaden their literacy base, and their exposure to a variety of literature.*

Thus, Q's view may be seen as an early emphasis on 'learning to read' and later years are used to a develop a deeper understanding of text types and structures.

Aims of Reading Instruction in the Upper Primary School:

Two strands of general aims may be discerned within the philosophies and pedagogies of R and Q. Both teachers considered that primary school instruction needs to develop an individual's ability to read, and that enjoyment of reading is also an important consideration. However, the emphasis each teacher placed on these aims resulted in very different programmes. Within Q's instruction, emphasis was first and foremost on enjoyment.

> Q: *I guess in terms of philosophy, my philosophy is that no child should get out of primary school without being able to read.. and that.. at least for me, to have helped them to enjoy it and get pleasure from it; for it to be fun and exciting, as well as useful and pragmatic... The main aspect of reading I think is having kids engage and enjoy it.*

To this end, Q enlists activities such as the Pizza Hut 'Book-It' scheme which rewards students with a pizza when they have read a personally set target. However, to further motivate students to read, Q combined the 'Book-It' scheme with a class trip to the movies where she accompanied them in slippers and pyjamas.

Q also aims for students to read *at a high level.* By 'high level' Q identifies two aspects of expectations for year seven readers. One relates to the type of books that students at this level choose to read. *(I)t worries me about the literature they choose to read for pleasure, and so many of them choose to read 'Babysitters' Club' or 'Pony Club' or R.L.Stein books.* The second aspect of reading at a 'high level' relates to a depth of understanding of the text and its impact on the reader. *They have an increasing level of understanding of what*

they're reading and how it relates to them and the world around them. Q aims to engender an understanding of how a text may develop not only knowledge about a particular topic or situation, but also how that knowledge may affect the reader's ways of relating to people in real life.

In contrast, R's reading instruction is primarily functional and enjoyment is seen as a consequence of confidence in the ability to read.

> R: *Functional efficiency is the word, and understanding that even though they may not necessarily enjoy what they're reading, most of it is set for a purpose... like any skill, the more they practise it, the more efficient they become.*

Through practising and mastery of reading as a skill, students will be more likely to persevere with longer and/or more difficult texts and to develop confidence with their reading ability. Confidence is the key to enjoyment. To this end, ability groupings were used, and practise with a wide variety of everyday genres was provided. It must be noted that students' enjoyment of the task of reading is viewed differently by R and Q. Whereas Q promotes the fun in enjoyment of reading, R has a broader definition of enjoyment encompassing the attitude of *not to see it as a chore.* R also makes reference to the ability of reading as an escape mechanism. He terms this *going for a holiday in your head.*

> R: *You know when kids say 'I'm bored'; get a book. Go for a holiday in your head; because that's what books do...*

So, while Q sees enjoyment as excitement and fun, R identifies reading enjoyment as a release from drudgery.

Reading Lessons:

In discussing their reading instructional practices, both Q and R chose to concentrate on specific reading lessons even though both made reference to the promotion of reading skills in other areas of the curriculum. Again, differences are evident in their approaches to the content and practices within these lessons.

Q has two or three lessons per week devoted to reading instruction. These lessons usually take the form of reading and responding as a whole class or in mixed ability groups to a shared text. Q generally selects narrative texts, with some other genres (e.g. reports, poetry, opinions) included. She prefers not to use the reading programme that the school suggests as these do not include complete narratives but bases her instructional points around those outlined in the First Steps programme from Western Australia.

> Q: *The main book has stories but you get like four pages of a story and then that's it. So it's tiny little extracts and it's extremely non-satisfying... If you want kids to really be involved, they have to know what happens in the end...*

Texts are selected with availability and the needs of students in mind. Q was concerned that the students had poor vocabulary skills so chose texts that she considered used vocabulary and language well. A lack of historical and geographical knowledge was a concern as well. At one point, Q felt that the students had *a degree of learnt racism,* so a text was chosen to highlight racism and differing points of view. At other times, Q will choose texts to address a theme. The topic of stereotyping in texts was addressed by an analysis of fairy tales. Visual texts such as films are also included as reading resources. The ability to express an opinion and provide supporting evidence for that opinion is a skill that Q considers important. To this end, and in keeping with her emphasis on reading as fun, Q and the class participated in *combat reading.* This activity involved students arguing with Q about a point in the shared text.

Q insists on the use of mixed ability groups at this level. While the need of some students for further decoding skills is noted and built into the reading programme, Q emphasises the need for students at the year seven level to be thinking about what they read. She considers that the skills of the poorer readers will improve by participation in mixed ability groups.

> Q: *Really poor readers, I'm finding that their ability to read out aloud has improved, and I've also found that their comprehension has improved from being exposed to the better readers. Every year I find that.*

Mixed ability grouping is also seen as a way of building confidence within poorer readers. Q feels that even though poorer readers may not be able to read aloud as well as other students, they quickly begin to infer and construct their own opinions on what is read. Confidence as a reader is enhanced when poorer readers can offer ideas and opinions just as better readers do. Groups are then constructed by considering which students will interact well.

Reading lessons are characterised by introducing a new novel or recapping events, making predictions and/or evaluating previous predictions. New vocabulary is investigated and the text is read in groups. At the conclusion of the lesson, the text is critically analysed (e.g. character development identified, author choices discussed) either orally or with written questions.

The teacher reading to the class is not a feature of Q's reading instruction as she states that there is not enough time for this, and also because she prefers students to be following the words as someone reads.

> Q: *But if you're looking at some of those words on the page, I always hope that the next time they come across it they will remember it; whereas if they just hear it, visually it's not familiar.*

Q feels too that twenty minutes spent listening to the teacher read, limits the amount of time available for students to discuss their responses to texts. Discussion is a valued part of reading instruction in this classroom. Comprehension is developed through such

discussions, based on student reactions and responses to text and the teacher's oral or written questions. Reading cards were tried but found unsuccessful with the class Q was teaching at the time of the interviews.

The teacher reading to the class is not a regular occurrence in R's classroom either for the same reasons. R timetables four reading lessons per week in his classroom. He points out that this is not because he wishes to compartmentalise the teaching of reading, (*reading is all pervasive*) but as an organisational necessity as R has the support teacher come in and take his group of poorer readers. Four set periods of reading each week also allows for equal access to all students of a limited number of resources. From his experience R feels that ability grouping works better than mixed ability groups.

> R: *The poorer readers (in mixed ability groups), theoretically, what's supposed to happen is that they will pick up the skills of the others, but what you get is the better readers are doing nothing but tutoring the poorer readers, so they're not developing their own skills, and the poorer readers are allowing them to do exactly that, because it's the easy way out.*

R feels that readers of similar abilities can respond and contribute to discussion of a text at a reasonably equal standard. Each lesson has a particular focus for each group. One lesson per week is set aside to read the core novel, another is to complete activities and worksheets associated with the core novel; one lesson is for personal choice reading, and the last is for comprehension activities. R does not see that reading aloud to the group as others look on is productive. Grouping is merely a way of allowing equal access to resources. Once groups and activities have been set up, R has *very little input whatsoever. The rest is up to them.* An aspect of R's classroom practice with students at the year seven level is to promote their *functioning as individual students* and to be independent workers. R approaches comprehension through promoting rereading of a text once a question framework has been established. The comprehension abilities of the students are identified early in the year and R then builds in activities that extend on those levels of understanding. Later in the year R uses past examples of comprehension activities from standardised tests that promote interpretative skills such as instructions and cartoons, to familiarise students with test structures.

R utilises the school selected reading programme in his classroom. This programme contains a collection of texts centred around various themes. Pertaining to each theme are a variety of texts incorporating a range of literary and non-literary genres *to suit a range of people.* Not every child will read all of the texts, but students will be able to read those they are interested in. To supplement these materials, R constructs his own worksheets to allow experiences with functional texts such as timetables and repair manuals. *So, everyday lifeskill type stuff we dwell on that for the last half of the year anyway.* Such an aspect can be seen in direct connection to R's view of reading as functional.

There are some similarities within the reading instructional practices of these two teachers but comparison is better marked by their disparities. Both teachers use set times for reading lessons, and both utilise groupwork. Neither R nor Q read aloud to their class and consider the actual movement of students eyes across a text more productive than simply listening to the teacher read. Time is considered a problem by both teachers. The comparison of instructional practices of these two however show distinctly that R and Q vary considerably.

A quick recap can aid identification of these differences. Instruction in Q's classroom is about enjoyment, R's is focussed on functional efficiency. Q selects independent texts that are mainly narrative. R uses a commercially prepared reading programme. Q promotes social interaction around texts, R focuses on individual completion of tasks. Ability groups are a feature of R's classroom while Q prefers mixed ability groups. Comprehension in Q's classroom centres around discussion, R prefers written activities completed independently. It is no surprise then that theoretical orientations to reading instruction differ for these two experienced teachers.

Theoretical Orientations:

Firstly it must be pointed out that both teachers displayed elements of all three theoretical approaches investigated (i.e. skills, psycholinguistic and social approaches). R has shown predominantly a skills orientation to the teaching of reading with his emphasis on functional efficiency. While his description of reading as a meaning making process and interpretation influenced by personal experience and prior knowledge are aspects of psycholinguistic theory, his approach to comprehension through practice is definitely a focus on skill development. R does mention the term 'immersion' in relation to experiencing new genres, however how he uses these examples to promote knowledge of these genres was unfortunately not followed up by the researcher. R's use of everyday texts does relate to psycholinguistic thought though. The inclusion and emphasis on a variety of genre, (informative texts gaining much mention) is indicative of basic social thought but it is not supported by social interaction or cultural awareness of text and ideology, which would have strengthened indications of this approach.

Q's theoretical orientations seem to lie more prominently in psycholinguistic and social approaches than do R's. Her comments suggest that she is more skills oriented with younger classes, but with year sevens her approach makes use of much social interaction around text and an emphasis on meaning making through development of content knowledge and prior experience which is reminiscent of a psycholinguistic approach. A psycholinguistic stance is also apparent through Q's insistence on the use of whole texts, the teaching of skills in context, and the interpretation of text based on prior knowledge. The style of analysis of texts including acknowledgement of decisions made by producers of texts and statement of supported personal opinions owes allegiance to social theory. Attention to such topics as stereotyping and investigation of social and cultural nuances strengthens Q's social orientation.

Gender Perceptions:

An interesting point of variance arose in the area of perceptions of gender differences by R and Q. In Q's interviews, I posed the question of gender differences in the last interview in terms of reading ability. Q stated that she felt good readers *came from boys and girls.* However, the gender issue was raised firstly by R in his initial interview with me. R generalises that girls are more aware of the need to read, and are more able than boys at this age with reading given that girls are normally two years ahead in maturity.

> R: *Not only are they (girls).. more switched on, not only have they the ability because of their two years maturational difference at this age, to see the big picture and the reason for the need to have this skill, do they read the novels and what have you, and they're just more self-directed. Whereas.. I think boys tend to want fast responses from stuff on the page. They want colour. They want pictures. They don't want to have a great deal of text. Ah, they're not necessarily all reluctant readers but they just want immediacy from it.*

R stated elsewhere that generally girls read novels whereas boys won't, preferring little text with graphics and pictures. Such statements were generalisations from his own experience.

Personal Reading Preferences:

Interestingly, when asked to state his personal reading preferences, R said that he did not read novels either, unless they had an historical base since history is an interest of his.

> R: *My own personal reading is pretty much like what I expect kids to be able to do. It's functional... I tend to read things that I will get knowledge from, be they practical books on how to build something or how to garden effectively...*

R's reading tastes also ran to current affairs and National Geographic magazines. Q on the other hand declared her love for reading without prompting early in the first interview with the researcher.

> Q: *I'm an avid reader.. you know, one of those who reads in the toilet, reads the cornflakes box, and I'm just one of those people. If you put anything in front of me I'll read it... because it's a passion for me, I like to try and make it a passion for the kids that I teach.*

Although Q did not detail further the texts she prefers to read, I noted that when talking about using narratives to promote reading, the statement was made that *you get kids who hate to read, hate, hate novels so they always choose non-fiction.* Q elaborates that she had found two or three children in each class who have a preference for non-fiction and will struggle to read a novel. She then follows with the comment:

But it always staggers me to think, 'How could you not want to read?'

The inference here seems to be that children cannot be considered to like reading unless they read novels. The assumption is therefore that Q does enjoy novel reading.

Perceived Influences:

When questioned about what they felt was the greatest influence on their teaching beliefs, R spoke of his own experiences at school. He spoke of the expectations and role models of the teachers he had had in primary and secondary school whom he considered to be 'good teachers'. From these experiences R developed the expectation of long term effort for success. He did not make comment on preservice teacher education or on specific professional development opportunities about reading. It should be pointed out though that R's preservice education would have been when the skills approach to reading was prominent. This may have had some influence on R's strong skills orientation, although this approach may also be more suited to his personality. Much comment that would relate to how R teaches reading and his beliefs extend from his personal classroom experiences. His generalisations about gender differences and grouping strategies relate to what he has noted within classroom events. R stated an interest in Science, Mathematics and History, and is presently studying psychology. It could be assumed then that reading instruction, though acknowledged as *an all pervasive skill* within and across the curriculum, is not a priority for R. He is deliberate in the strategies he uses with reading (e.g. lessons, grouping, variety of genre) but acknowledges others' expertise as far as much of the content is concerned. In using the set reading programme he notes that it is composed by someone who has *thought well and truly through* the variety of materials included in the programme, and so R does not have to *think too much about them*. He also is happy to leave work on text and author evaluation and appreciation to the librarian whom R explains knows more about the topic than he does.

In contrast, Q declared her passion for reading very early in the interview series. Again, little acknowledgement is given to preservice teacher education as having a significant influence on her reading instruction. Mention was made of doing a unit on Children's Literature while upgrading her qualifications, however Q found it *dull* and *boring*. Q decries the fact that she missed out on earlier professional development opportunities on reading such as FLIP and ELIC as she was in the wrong area of the school each time. (i.e. teaching higher grades when ELIC was being provided for teachers of early grades; and vice versa for FLIP). However, Q nominates experiences in small schools as having a major impact on her understanding of and approach to the teaching of reading. Classroom experiences across all year levels provided Q with an understanding of the overall process of reading instruction throughout the primary school. Small schools also allow for greater discourse between teaching colleagues and so an element of knowing what other teachers do is apparent. Contemplation of content and process was again extended when Q was involved in translating the then 'new' syllabus into a workable document for a cluster of small schools. Q does make mention of seminars to do with reading (e.g. Whole Language approach) and suggests that some of the ideas were adopted after evaluation by herself and/or with other teachers. Interaction with colleagues was seen as

important. The interview journal completed by the researcher makes note of a comment by Q that she would be surprised of any expected changes to reading instruction that she is not aware of as she reads to keep informed of developments. Professional reading about reading is obviously a part of Q's professional knowledge development.

Much mention of personal experience is referred to in knowledge gained about the needs of students at the year seven level. These referred to areas of instructional strategies (e.g. grouping, use of comprehension cards), and content (e.g. themes for critical analysis, motivational activities). Interestingly, Q found no gender bias in reading ability and no mention was made of gendered preferences in reading materials. This runs counter to R's experience.

Above all though, Q's passion for reading can be seen to have a large impact on how she teaches reading. Her insistence on enjoyment as the major aim stems from her own enjoyment of reading. Metaphors and terms used are reminiscent of narratives. Q uses many metaphors to describe her teaching role or her feelings at the end of the teaching day. Reading strategies are even seen as battles (e.g. 'combat reading'). The use of complete texts rather than short extracts is a personal preference although Q feels that students prefer whole texts as well.

Conclusions:

Meijer (2001) states that 'A teacher's knowledge and beliefs are important determinants of a teacher's actions' and that seems to have been borne out with this research. The beliefs about reading and reading instruction uncovered in this study for each teacher can be traced through classroom practices. While both R and Q acknowledge reading as an important skill to develop as well as enjoy, the emphasis each teacher places on these has resulted in very different programmes. R's belief that reading is a skill necessary to functioning in the wider world is reflected in his inclusion of a wide variety of everyday texts for students to become acquainted with, and the use of practice activities. Q's orientation to reading as an enjoyable pursuit has led her to emphasise a variety of narratives in her programme, along with activities that promote fun, and a critical approach to analysis as a way of appreciating literature and authors' choices.

Q's passion for reading has almost certainly burgeoned her commitment to remain up to date with professional reading on the subject. This aspect of professional knowledge is not apparent in R's account. It would seem logical to assume that an individual's personal interest in a particular subject would aid in encouraging that person to keep closer note of what is developing in that area. It would also seem understandable that those individuals with lesser interest and expertise in a particular curriculum area would look to the expertise of others for guidance. The use of some teachers in the primary school to take instruction for all classes across a year level in their area of interest would support this contention. It is crucial then that those with expertise in a curriculum area share their knowledge and experiences with their teaching colleagues to keep all teachers advancing in appropriate practices. It is also apparent that some critical reflection on current beliefs and practices be undertaken to allow for identification and adoption of desirable change.

Given that these two series of interviews were conducted in the same context with two experienced teachers, the difference in interpretation of experiences is interesting. Discussions on practical knowledge highlight the fact that practical knowledge is difficult to generalise as it is built on personal experiences from within different contexts. This may be so but the standpoints of Q and R on the issue of gender and of the use of mixed ability groups in relation to reading is still puzzling. Archer's contention (2000, p.1) that personal philosophy affects how personal experience is interpreted may shed light here. It is felt that what one believes influences how experience is interpreted and that 'teachers selectively choose information that confirms beliefs, even to the point of distorting evidence'. New knowledge is acquired by evaluating and processing it so that it fits with existing beliefs. If this is the case, then true evaluation of experience allowing for change if change is required, can only be apparent if beliefs are identified and questionned.

The analysis of theoretical orientations to reading instruction provided another dimension of difference between the approaches of these two teachers. The Four Resource Model promoted by Luke and Freebody purports to subsume different methodologies and so is able to be adopted by all practitioners. This may be so, however this research would suggest that some teachers will adapt more readily than others. Adaptation to any new development would be heightened by a positive correlation between practitioners' beliefs and those underlying the innovation. Therefore, information on underlying theory and practical applications should be introduced along with (or even preceded by) some individual reflection on practice and belief. This seems particularly important when working towards whole school literacy plans. For effective application of planning for whole school approaches, consensus and commitment to theoretical underpinnings must be apparent. Achieving this may not be easy.

This comparative study into reading instruction in the upper primary school has served to highlight differences in approaches that may be apparent within classrooms. The importance of personal experience, beliefs and knowledge in determining teacher practice is emphasised. Implications for the professional development of teachers suggest that the introduction of developments in pedagogy need to firstly promote identification of individual teacher practices and beliefs. As many of these beliefs may take root in the student lives of teachers, it is imperative that preservice teacher education begins the process of critical reflection with their charges to open minds to the critique of tacit beliefs and the possibility of change. Implementation of curriculum change will always be problematic given the range of personal and professional beliefs present in any teaching staff, and the idiosyncratic nature of practical knowledge. Difficulties will occur where beliefs of individual teachers affected by their personal experiences run counter to the underlying assumptions of pedagogical innovations. Curriculum innovations should be explored and questioned by teachers before implementation, however teachers must also be aware of the need for change in their own practice before adaptations can occur.

This study has suggested further areas of research. The affective domain of reading including that of how to promote reading is one such area. Is it practical to expect that all students will enjoy reading or is it more realistic to aim for an appreciation of reading and what it can do? How is enjoyment of reading best promoted in primary schools? What

types of texts should be incorporated into the reading programme in the upper-primary school? Such a study would necessarily need to include investigation of the educational and social needs of transition students, and the views of the students themselves.

Reading is a necessary and 'all pervasive' skill of modern society. The needs of the reader have changed over time and with these, the needs of teachers to meet changing instructional roles and practices. Much has been done to assist teachers of reading with young classes and it is now timely to aid teachers working with older students.

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